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Identical letters dated 23 February 2012 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

I refer to the events that are taking place in Syria; the deliberate distortion by certain States of what is happening; and the encouragement, arms and finance which some of them are providing to the armed terrorist groups, and should like to clearly set out the health situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and some of the challenges that are being faced by the health sector.

In the belief that every citizen has the right to health, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has accorded the health sector special importance. It is convinced that appropriate health conditions must be provided if all citizens are to have access to health services, and continually strives to ensure that health services are equitably distributed, free of charge. Health-care services are provided by 124 public hospitals, 1,919 health centres and 387 private hospitals. In the past nine months alone, Ministry of Health institutions have provided more than 30 million health services. National hospitals have treated some 4.5 million patients, while health centres have provided more than 24 million health services that have benefited the health of citizens.

Notwithstanding the noble humanitarian purpose for which those health facilities were established and all the splendid humanitarian services the health sector provides, many foreign parties, with a view to achieving their own external political aims, insist on dragging that sector into matters to which it is in no way related and on using it as both a tool and a target in their war against Syria. The health sector has sustained heavy human and material losses as a result of the destructive operations that are being carried out by terrorist groups and organizations, which have included attacks on hospitals and health centres, the emergency services and their personnel, and doctors and nurses. For example, al-Naimi hospital in Homs governorate was attacked and its contents, including furniture and medical equipment, looted, with a view to denying citizens and, in particular, patients from Homs and Hama governorates, their right to the free health-care services that are provided by the State. A total of 15 doctors and medical staff were martyred, including the head of the Idlib branch of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, and a further 27 emergency workers were injured while carrying out their humanitarian duties in the field, transporting injured persons to hospital, at the hands of armed terrorist groups that are engaging in gang warfare. Furthermore, doctors and emergency workers have been systematically abducted and emergency vehicles seized: 129 ambulances have been set on fire or destroyed, and certain

medical departments in 17 public hospitals have been burnt and destroyed. Some hospitals have been looted, including al-Qusair hospital in Homs governorate, which has had to be closed.

All of the above is accompanied by systematic, inflammatory foreign media campaigns against the health sector that are designed to mislead and distort. As an example, we may cite the story that was spread by certain of the misleading and defamatory media alleging that 20 premature babies in the neonatal department of al-Walid hospital in Homs died on 8 February 2012 as the result of a power cut. The aim is to incite citizens and turn foreign public opinion against the health sector, to misrepresent the immense humanitarian service it provides, and to turn it into an object of suspicion, thereby denying citizens access to its institutions, inciting public opinion against and damaging it. We implore you to affirm that such allegations are false. The foreign media have also ignored the facts that have been presented to them by the Ministry of Health and the fact that the Ministry has refuted this totally fabricated information.

Here, I should like to note that the unjust sanctions that have been imposed by Arab and European countries and the United States of America have led, to give only one example, to a shortage of medical material and supplies and of all therapeutic necessities that are imported from abroad, which has affected the quality and volume of the humanitarian services that can be provided to patients in hospitals and other health institutions, as well as impacting Ministry of Health plans for modernizing and developing the sector and improving the quality of the health services it provides.

I should like to underline here that, despite the heavy human and material losses that were mentioned above, which have been sustained as the result of armed terrorist organization attacks on doctors, emergency crews and health institutions, those who work in this sector continue, to the extent possible, to provide health services to all citizens without exception and regardless of their political affiliation. I stress that, despite those losses, the Syrian Arab Republic asserts its right to protect its citizens and ensure that their needs are met. It is committed to the comprehensive, genuine reform programme, notwithstanding all the foreign attempts to obstruct its implementation.

As we place these facts before you, we implore you to work with all the international humanitarian organizations to reverse the health situation and the challenges which are faced in that regard that we have referred to above, and to condemn and repudiate the unilateral measures and sanctions that have been imposed by certain States, and the criminal acts that are targeting the health sector, health institutions and medical staff. At the same time, the Syrian Government holds the foreign parties that are financing, inciting and arming the terrorist groups and providing them with various types of support in targeting the infrastructure, including public and private hospitals, health centres, the emergency services and medical personnel, responsible for the destruction to which those institutions are being subjected at the hands of the terrorists and the armed groups. The Syrian Arab Republic would welcome any technical assistance that the United Nations could offer to the Ministry of Health which would enable it to continue to provide health services to citizens who need them in the difficult circumstances and under the unjust siege to which, contrary to all international norms and laws, the health sector in Syria is being subjected.

It would be highly appreciated if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bashar **Ja'afari**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative